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Editorial

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DEAR READERS

Although this issue is officially an “unthemed” one, this set of articles represents thinking and research about how foundations go about their work. It could easily be called “the strategy issue.” As foundations have struggled with issues of what value they add beyond providing dollars, the concept of “strategic philanthropy” has taken root.

Not surprisingly, there are many different definitions of strategic philanthropy. A Google search of “strategic philanthropy” in early January 2011 resulted in 288,000 hits. For corporate donors and family foundations, the term is often used to describe philanthropy that is intended to serve the “double-bottom line” of doing well (marketing products) and doing good (serving a societal need). In the context of large private foundations and community foundations, the term usually refers to efforts to address the root causes of social problems.



The common denominator is that the funder has a point of view about the desired outcomes and impacts. Rather than only responding to needs identified by grantees, strategic funders are proactive about identifying grantee partners whose missions align with their own goals for fundamental change in social or public systems. This type of support is often more “hands on,” with technical assistance and capacity building included in the philanthropic package.

The articles in this issue address the implications of this more targeted approach for funders.

Jarosewich and Mir report on a pilot test of a certification program for college access services. By creating a mechanism for these service providers to assess themselves against best practices, the foundation sought to impact the overall quality of a system of services for helping students from low income families gain access to college. They have some specific lessons about how foundations can set up certification programs, including developing partnerships and networks to facilitate development of the program and training in the certification rubric.

Hwalek and Williams share their experience in developing and using quarterly feedback memos to guide the development of a complex initiative. These memos combined data collection with expert synthesis to encourage discussion and learning in an initiative designed to promote state-level policy change to impact higher education productivity. The memos were used to foster conversation and inform decisionmaking and were only helpful when used appropriately.

Picher and Adams share a set of tools developed by The William Penn Foundation to articulate and assess its progress toward strategic goals. The tools provide practical ways to document and communicate strategic goals and the actions implemented to achieve them. While these tools are labor intensive to use, making sustainability a concern, they represent a significant contribution to strategic philanthropy’s toolkit.

Patrizi and Thompson tackle the issue of how deeply foundations really have embraced strategic philanthropy. They argue that while many foundations have developed strategic plans, few have made the internal changes necessary to actually behave strategically. They suggest that in order to get beyond the veneer of strategic philanthropy, foundation leaders need to be clearer about their own role in creating change, develop the strategic capacities to do so, and then apply those capacities, learn from them, and improve them over time. The tools described above suggest some specific mechanisms for making these changes – creating standards and networks to advance them, using the appropriate tools to describe and track progress, and using data in a timely way to learn and make corrections.

Allen-Meares, Gant, Shanks, and Hollingsworth explore the implications of “embedded philanthropy” – a type of strategic philanthropy in which the funder is part of, and committed over the long-term to, the community in which it works. A key principle of embedded funders is to work participatively with the community, including framing evaluations in less theoretical, more actionable ways. These funders become much more engaged with community institutions – and politics – than most foundations. They take positions and advocate for the under-represented segments of the community.

Greeley and Greeley share their analysis of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation’s SPARK initiative sought to link the pre-kindergarten and school worlds as a way to position vulnerable children for greater success in the early grades. The initiative was also the foundation’s first attempt at a large-scale initiative with an explicit changemaker role. To create change, a foundation must articulate – and commit to – a point of view about how change can occur. The authors argue that a foundation that intends to create change must be prepared to take responsibility for results and create the internal structures that promote accountability and collaboration. The nature of the SPARK effort called for abandoning the silos of portfolio management and developing a new collaborative approach, both internally and with external partners.

In the final article, **Klugman** offers a theory-of-change framework for social-justice advocacy. She argues that this framework is needed in order to help retain the social-justice values in the advocacy process. One of the critical social-justice values that supports the establishment and maintenance of alliances is collaboration, which must continue to be nurtured after the advocacy campaign.

As a whole, the articles in this issue illuminate the ways in which structure and strategy are intertwined. Internal organizational structures (e.g., programmatic v. collaborative teams); the management and learning tools that are used (including evaluation tools and products); and relationships with grantees, community members, and other resource providers are all impacted by a shift to strategic grantmaking. These deep structural changes are not easy to make, but the hope for a more targeted and effective philanthropic sector will not be realized if these challenges are not faced.



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